

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY

CARLTON SIMMONS

Plaintiff,

v.

ERIC TAYLOR, WARDEN, et al.,

Defendants.

HON. JEROME B. SIMANDLE

Civil No. 10-1192 (JBS/AMD)

OPINION

APPEARANCES:

Carlton Simmons
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Plaintiff pro se

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Aramark, Inc., and Dietician Carey

SIMANDLE, Chief Judge:

I. INTRODUCTION

This action is before the Court on the unopposed motion of Defendants Aramark Correctional Services, LLC, Aramark, Inc., and Dietician Carey to dismiss Plaintiff's claims against them for failure to state a claim. [Docket Item 21.] In this action, Plaintiff Carlton Simmons, proceeding pro se, alleges that while he was a pretrial detainee at the Camden County Correctional Facility ("CCCF") in 2009 his constitutional rights were violated by Defendants and other responsible state actors. In their

instant motion, Defendants argue that Plaintiff fails to allege facts showing a violation of his Fourteenth Amendment Right to Due Process related to the food he was served while he was confined at the CCCF. As will be explained below, the Court agrees that the specific treatment Plaintiff alleges was committed by the moving Defendants does not amount to punishment prior to the adjudication of guilt or treatment that otherwise states a claim for a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Court will consequently grant Defendants' motion to dismiss.

II. BACKGROUND

As this action is before the Court on a motion to dismiss for failure to state a claim, the Court takes as true all factual allegations contained in the Complaint. Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009). Plaintiff was held as a pretrial detainee in the CCCF between at least July 10, 2009 and March 5, 2010. Compl. ¶ 5. Plaintiff alleges that while he was there, the facility was overcrowded. Id. ¶¶ 21-24. Plaintiff alleges that the overcrowding and management of the CCCF caused him several kinds of injuries by several different parties. Id. ¶¶ 34-36. As relates to the moving Defendants, Plaintiff alleges that he was served meals in an unsanitary manner, including food served on trays that were not clean ("Unsanitary Meal Service" ¶¶ a-c on 9), and that the meals that Defendants prepared and served

contained inadequate calories. ("Failure to Provide Proper Calorie Intake" ¶¶ a-g on 9-11).

Specifically, Plaintiff alleges that particular meals served on November 25, 2009 and December 1, 2009 departed from the posted menu that Defendant Dietician Carey had prepared and signed. For example, on November 25, 2009, the advertised menu stated that the meal would consist of two franks, two buns, 3/4 cup of ranch beans, 1/2 cup of coleslaw, 1/2 cup of tossed salad, 1/2 oz of low-fat dressing, 1/4 oz of mustard, and 1/2 cup of vanilla pudding. Compl. ¶ iv at 11. By contrast, the actual lunch served (presumably to Plaintiff himself) on that day was: two hot dogs, two buns, four pieces of dry cabbage leaves, three spoonfuls of beans, and an apple. Id. at ¶ iii.

Plaintiff does not allege any facts indicating that he suffered any physical or psychological damage or injury from the actions of the moving Defendants. However, he does allege, generally, that he "suffered serious emotional and physical injuries, and has suffered real and measurable monetary damages" but does not allege facts supporting such conclusions. Id. ¶ 30 at 13. Plaintiff alleges that the treatment of Defendants violated his rights under both the Eighth Amendment and the Fourteenth Amendment.

Plaintiff filed his Complaint on March 5, 2010. On May 25, 2010, the Court dismissed Plaintiff's Eighth Amendment claims,

concluding that because Plaintiff alleged he was a pretrial detainee at the time of the conduct alleged, his rights are protected under the Fourteenth Amendment and not the Eighth Amendment. [Docket Item 7.]

Defendants have subsequently moved to dismiss, to which Plaintiff has filed no opposition.

III. DISCUSSION

A. Standard of Review

In order to give defendant fair notice, and to permit early dismissal if the complained-of conduct does not provide adequate grounds for the cause of action alleged, a complaint must allege, in more than legal boilerplate, those facts about the conduct of each defendant giving rise to liability. Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007); Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a) and 11(b) (3). These factual allegations must present a plausible basis for relief (i.e., something more than the mere possibility of legal misconduct). See Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 681 (2009).

In its review of a motion to dismiss pursuant to Rule 12(b)(6), Fed. R. Civ. P., the Court must "accept all factual allegations as true and construe the complaint in the light most favorable to the plaintiff." Phillips v. County of Allegheny, 515 F.3d 224, 231 (3d Cir. 2008) (quoting Pinker v. Roche

Holdings Ltd., 292 F.3d 361, 374 n. 7 (3d Cir. 2002)). The assumption of truth does not apply, however, to legal conclusions couched as factual allegations or to "[t]hreadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements." Iqbal, 556 U.S. at 678. The Court's task, when reviewing a motion pursuant to Rule 12(b)(6), is to "determine whether the facts alleged in the complaint are sufficient to show that the plaintiff has a plausible claim for relief, so the complaint must contain allegations beyond [merely claiming] plaintiff's entitlement to relief." Fowler v. UPMC Shadyside, 578 F.3d 203, 210-211 (3d Cir. 2009) (emphasis added).

When evaluating a motion to dismiss under Rule 12(b)(6), "[w]here the plaintiff is a pro se litigant, the court has an obligation to construe the complaint liberally." Giles v. Kearney, 571 F.3d 318, 322 (3d Cir. 2009) (citing Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520-521 (1972)). The Court will, therefore, construe facts alleged, wherever possible, in a manner favorable to Plaintiff, but even so, the Complaint must allege sufficient facts from which a plausible claim to relief can be shown.

B. Discussion

In his Complaint, Plaintiff brings four Counts against the moving Defendants: Counts III, IV, V and VI. Counts III and IV

are against Defendant Aramark, and Counts V and VI are against Defendants ACS and "Dietician", presumably Defendant Carey. The Court previously dismissed Counts III and V, which seek relief under the Eighth Amendment, in its sua sponte screening. [Docket Item 7.] Therefore, the sole remaining Counts against the moving Defendants are Counts IV and VI, which allege identical conduct, and claim that such conduct violates the Fourteenth Amendment's Due Process Clause.

Defendants argue that Plaintiff has not alleged facts sufficient to support a claim under the Fourteenth Amendment, because he has not alleged facts sufficient to demonstrate that any of his meals were unconstitutionally deficient in calories, or that the sanitation was sufficiently lacking as to violate the Fourteenth Amendment. The Court agrees.

The Court has previously stated that when a pretrial detainee such as Plaintiff raises a Fourteenth Amendment Due Process challenge, the Court looks to the standard set forth in Bell v. Wolfish, 441 U.S. 520 (1979), i.e., whether the conditions of confinement complained of amounted to punishment prior to the adjudication of guilt. See Acevedo v. CFG Health Systems Staff, Civ. No. 10-5103, 2010 WL 4703774 *4 (D.N.J. Nov. 12, 2010).

The Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment prohibits punishment of a pretrial detainee prior to an adjudication of

guilt in accordance with due process of law. See Bell v. Wolfish, 441 U.S. at 535. The Third Circuit summarized the conditions of confinement standard under Bell as follows:

[A] particular measure amounts to punishment when there is a showing of express intent to punish on the part of detention facility officials, when the restriction or condition is not rationally related to a legitimate non-punitive government purpose, or when the restriction is excessive in light of that purpose.

Stevenson v. Carroll, 495 F.3d 62, 68 (3d Cir. 2007) (citation and internal quotation marks omitted).

Thus, the Third Circuit has “distilled the Supreme Court’s teachings in Bell into a two-part test. We must ask, first, whether any legitimate purposes are served by these conditions, and second, whether these conditions are rationally related to these purposes.” Hubbard v. Taylor, 538 F.3d 229, 232 (3d Cir. 2008) (citation and internal quotation marks omitted). Moreover, the Fourteenth Amendment standard of unconstitutional punishment, like the Eighth Amendment’s cruel and unusual punishments standard, contains both an objective component and a subjective component:

Unconstitutional punishment typically includes both objective and subjective components. As the Supreme Court explained in Wilson v. Seiter, 501 U.S. 294 . . . (1991), the objective component requires an inquiry into whether “the deprivation [was] sufficiently serious” and the subjective component asks whether “the officials act[ed] with a sufficiently culpable state of mind[.]” Id. at

298 The Supreme Court did not abandon this bipartite analysis in Bell, but rather allowed for an inference of mens rea where the restriction is arbitrary or purposeless, or where the restriction is excessive, even if it would accomplish a legitimate governmental objective.

Stevenson, 495 F.3d at 68.

Under the Due Process Clause, prison officials must satisfy inmates' "basic human needs - e.g., food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and reasonable safety." Helling v. McKinney, 509 U.S. 25, 32 (1993). The Constitution requires "that prisoners be served 'nutritionally adequate food that is prepared and served under conditions which do not present an immediate danger to the health and well being of the inmates who consume it' [and] under certain circumstances a substantial deprivation of food may well be recognized as being of constitutional dimension." Robles v. Coughlin, 725 F.2d 12, 15 (2d Cir. 1983). "[A] prisoner's diet must provide adequate nutrition, but prison officials cannot be held liable under the [constitutional standard] unless the prisoner shows both an objectively serious risk of harm and that the officials knew about it and could have prevented it but did not." Mays v. Springborn, 575 F.3d 643, 648 (7th Cir. 2009) (citation omitted).

The allegations in Plaintiff's Complaint do not satisfy the objective component. While Plaintiff alleges that the food he was served on two different days departed from the posted menu,

and that on unspecified days the trays that the food was served on were not clean, these allegations do not meet the objective component described in Stevenson.

As to his caloric intake, the alleged deviations from the menu on the two specified days in late 2009 do not raise a plausible inference that Defendants caused Plaintiff to suffer from malnutrition as a result of having, for example, a "Nutri Grain bar" substituted for a slice of cake. See Compl. ¶ 48. Plaintiff's allegations do not permit the Court to conclude that he was offered an insufficient number of calories even for a single day, as the only specific allegations relate to single meals in the day, and Plaintiff's conclusory statements that his diet was insufficient is not accorded the presumption of truth under Iqbal.

As to the alleged unsanitary conditions, Plaintiff alleges that dirt, hair, foreign objects and dried food, on occasion, ended up on Plaintiff's tray, and that the trays smelled bad. See Compl. at "Unsanitary Meal Service" ¶¶ a-c on 9. These allegations, likewise, do not rise to the threshold of the objective component of the standard announced in Stevenson. Plaintiff does not allege that he or any other inmate became ill or otherwise suffered any injury from the preparation of the food. Indeed, Plaintiff does not allege facts sufficient to plausibly show that such conditions occurred frequently or rarely

during the time of his confinement at CCCF. Accordingly, the Court concludes that Plaintiff fails to state a claim against the moving Defendants in Counts IV and VI of the Complaint.

IV. CONCLUSION

For the reasons stated above, the Court will grant Defendants' motion to dismiss Counts IV and VI of the Complaint for failure to state a claim. The accompanying Order will be entered.

September 5, 2012
Date

s/ Jerome B. Simandle
JEROME B. SIMANDLE
Chief U.S. District Judge